



AAC for AAC's

Age Appropriate Communication for Adolescent and Adult Communicators with Severe/Profound Disabilities

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Who are the AACs?

Adolescent and Adult Communicators who may display significantly sub average **intellectual** functioning existing concurrently with deficits in **adaptive** behavior. They often possess concomitant **physical** and/or **sensory** deficits. Difficulties are manifested during the **developmental** period.



AACs with Moderate Cognitive Disability

- Can carry out work and self-care tasks with moderate supervision.
- Typically acquire communication skills in childhood, but may need assistance in utilizing AAC.
- Often able to live & function successfully within the community in a supervised environment such as a group home.



AACs with Severe Cognitive Disability

- Possibly will master basic self-care skills
- Might be able to live in a group home
- May use communication skills that vary from no intentional acts to multiword utterances
- Often needs assistance in utilization of AAC



AACs with Profound Cognitive Disability

- May develop basic self-care skills with direction and training
- Require high level of structure and supervision
- May use intentional and even symbolic communication with support
- Probably needs assistance in using AAC



Barriers for the AACs?

All adolescent and adult beginning communicators encounter barriers to participation in daily experiences. Some of those challenges may be present across the lifespan and are not necessarily unique to AACs.

What are some of the common characteristics of AACs that should be considered?



Common Characteristics

- Limited ability to understand and participate typically in the activities that are expected of someone at a particular age
- Personal preference for toys, activities and materials that are not age appropriate
- Effective though socially inappropriate communicative behaviors (e.g., tantrums)



Common Characteristics

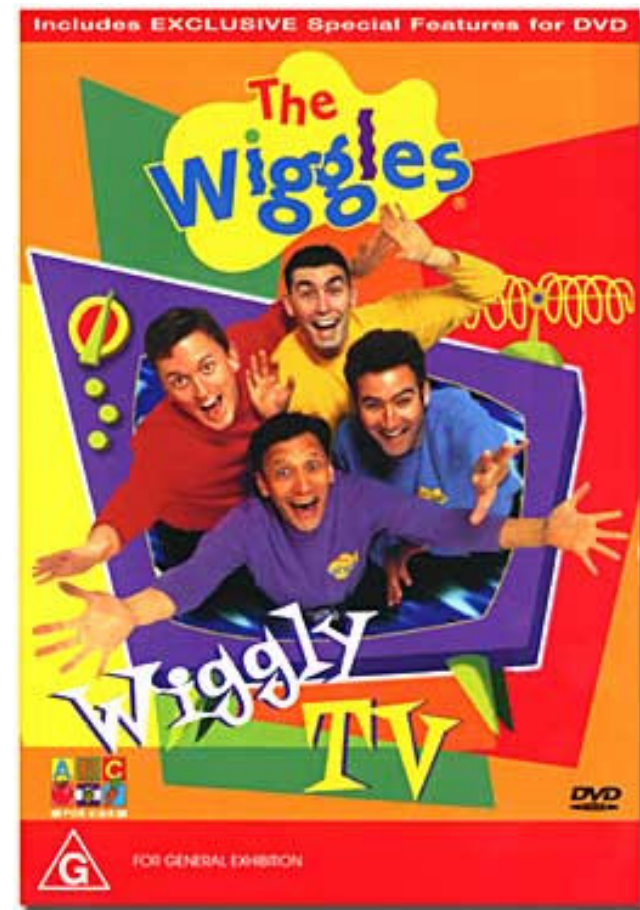
- Few things to talk about due to restrictive environment and limited experiences
- Little in common with same-age peers (who are often paid staff or volunteers)
- Learned helplessness created by caregivers providing too much assistance
- Dependence on others for creating, managing, and interpreting communication systems



Common Characteristics

- Low expectations from communication partners (even the professionals who serve them)
- Being treated as babies by others
- Exclusion from services based on chronological age

The Wizard of Oz vs. The Wiggles





Contrasting Pairs

- *The Wizard of Oz* and The Wiggles. Both involve live actors, colorful costumes and characters, and singing and dancing.
 - The former has become a cinematic classic, enjoyed by young and old alike for decades
 - The latter is inarguably a children's variety show with little appeal beyond the elementary school years.
- Though difficult to define, a difference is apparent
- What is the difference?

Oprah Winfrey vs. Mr. Rogers



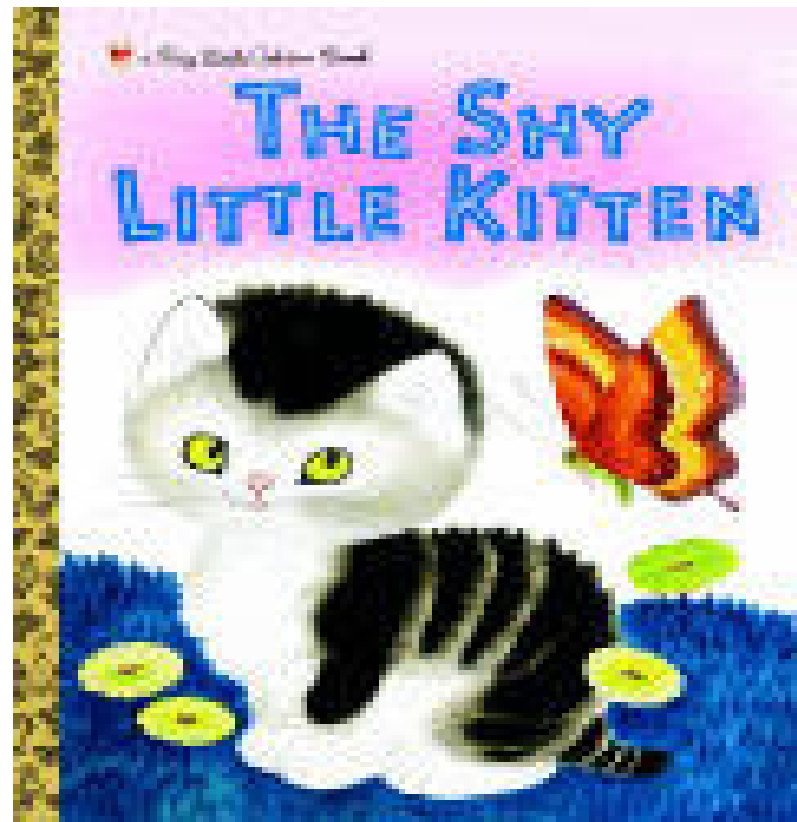
Comic Strips vs. Childish Illustrations

GET FUZZY

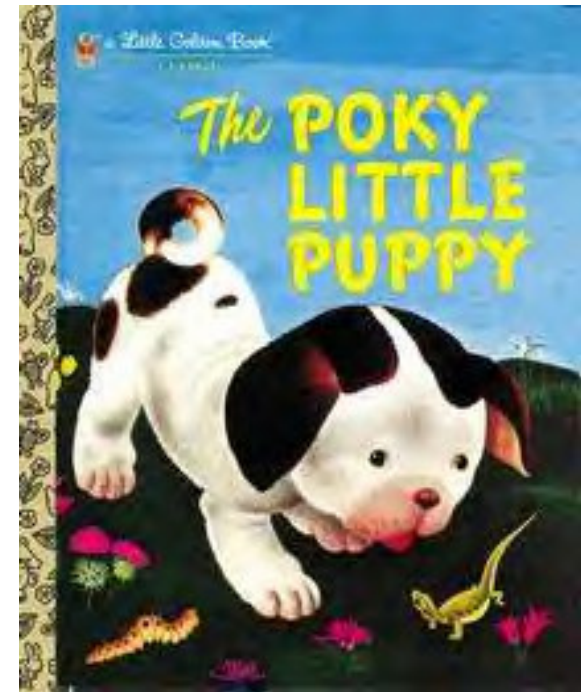
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Comic Strips vs. Childish Illustrations



Celebrities vs. Cartoon Characters



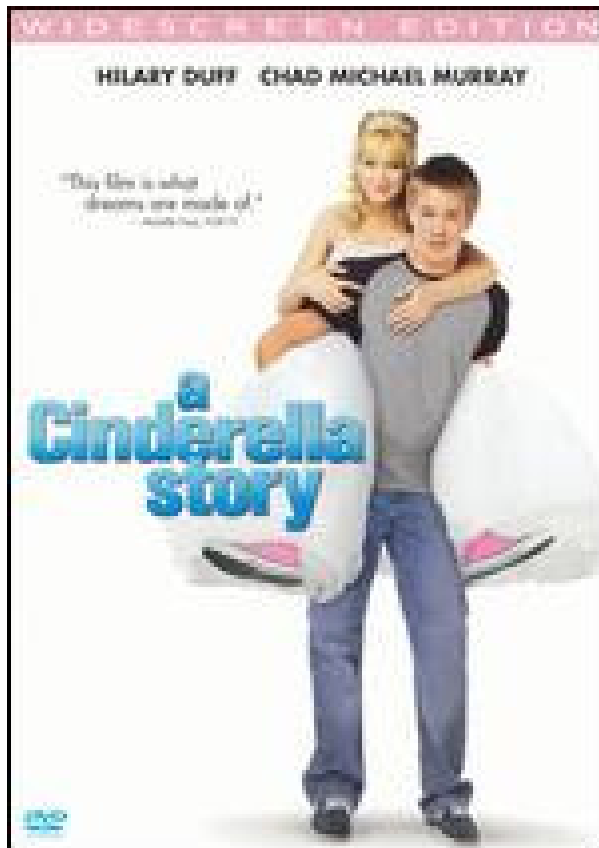
Celebrities vs. Cartoon Characters



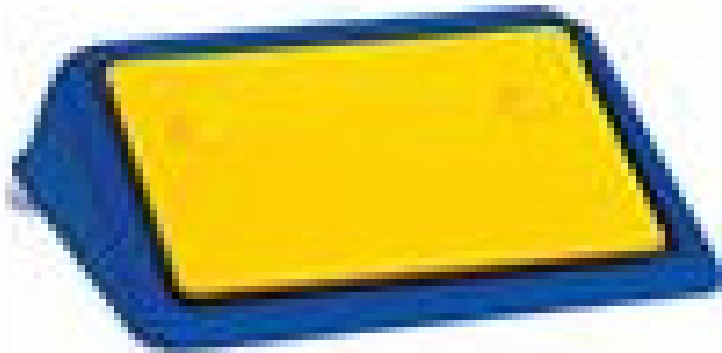
Live Action vs. Animation



Live Action vs. Animation



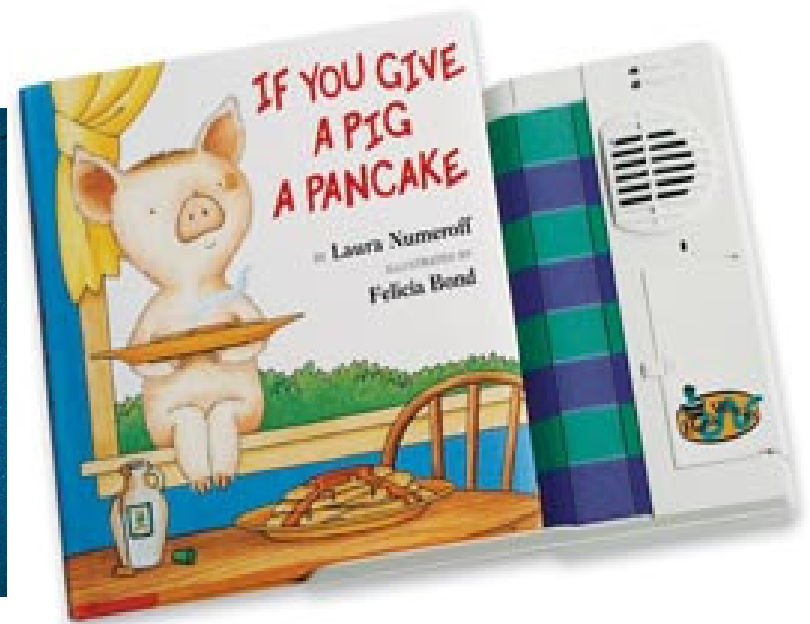
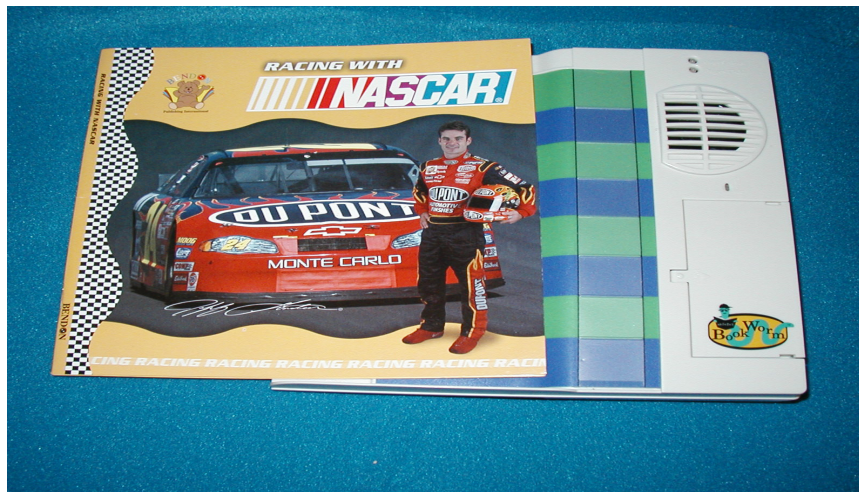
Unadorned vs. Adorned



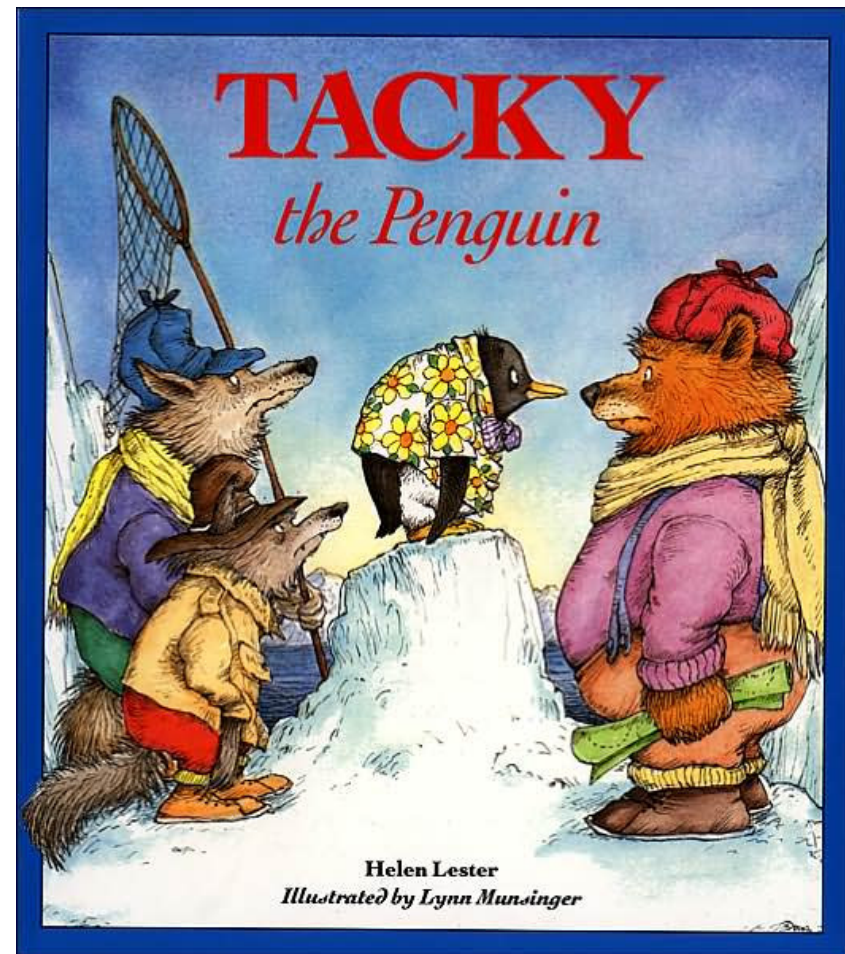
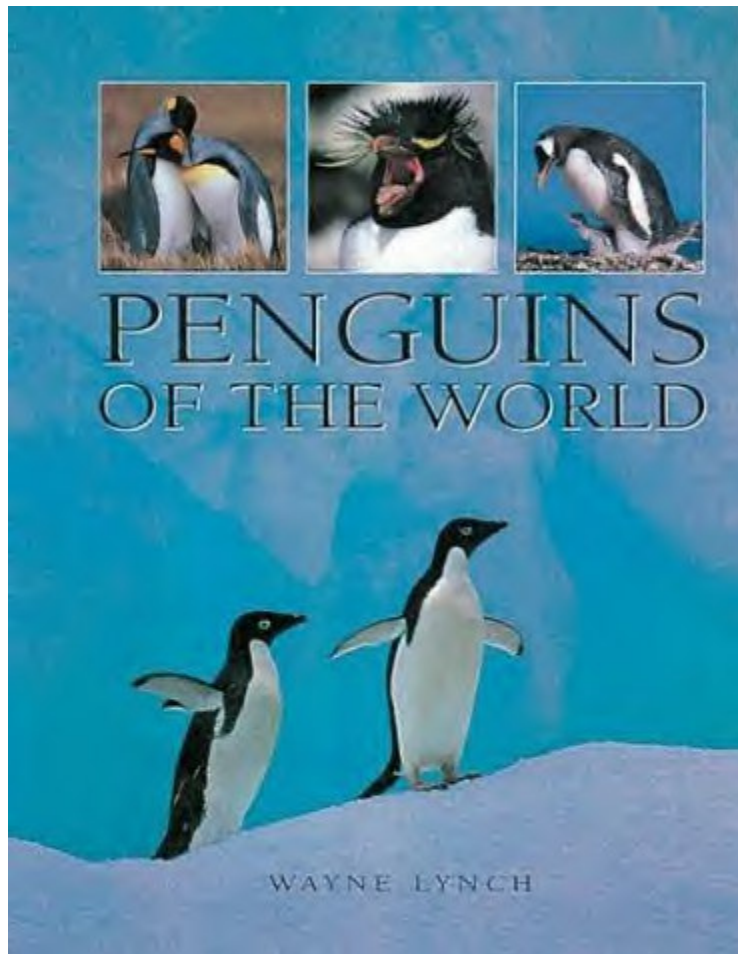
Unadorned vs. Adorned



Realistic vs. Cartoonish



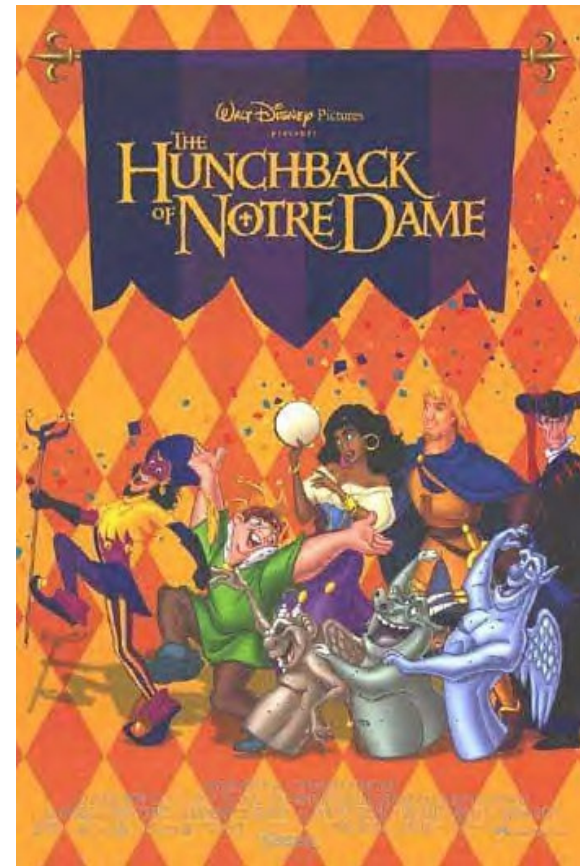
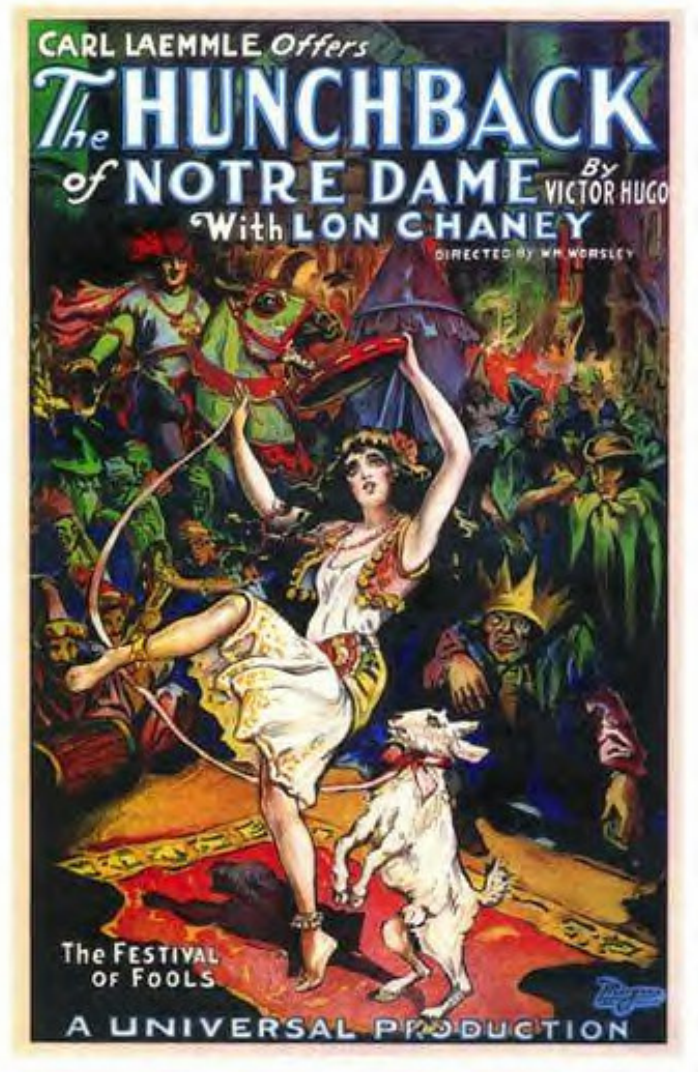
Realistic vs. Cartoonish



Classic vs. Adapted Version



Classic vs. Adapted Version





Identifying Differences in Contrasting Pairs

- Type of language used
- Topics
- Complexity of subjects
- Degree of realism
- Images
- Tone of voice
- Style of clothing
- Acceptability to peer group
- Levels of meaning
- Color



What is age appropriate?

By some standards, age appropriateness is solely defined by chronological age

However, the implementation of this philosophy ultimately does not meet the needs of most persons with disabilities



What is age appropriate?

Ideally age appropriate activities and materials should foster *social*, *intellectual*, *communicative*, and *emotional* development or improvement while considering the developmental or cognitive level and physical skills of the individual.



What is age appropriate?

Age appropriate supports must allow the individual to have:

- functional interactions
- control over the environment
- fulfillment of desires



What is age appropriate?

In short, the assistance provided must be meaningful to the individual. Let's consider exploring a Meaningful Age-appropriate Process

MAP



Is a MAP Needed?

Is it worth the time, energy and money expended to provide age appropriate communication, services and materials?

Most Certainly



Most Certainly A MAP is Needed

- All people have the right to be exposed to and have the option to choose to engage in age-appropriate activities and discussions.
- Ideally the perceptions of others will be positively affected when individuals have more age-appropriate systems of communication and topics about which to converse.
- The most meaningful benefit will be the more normal relationships that result.



Guiding Principles to the MAP

Families and professionals are well served by remembering a few basic guidelines for supporting adolescents and adult communicators:



Guiding Principles to the MAP

Access to age appropriate materials, activities, and environments supports perceptions of individuals as adults

Exposure to the interests of typical peers is one of the most basic normalization processes available.

- Reduces the possibility that the person will be viewed as juvenile or mentally incapacitated
- Provides common interest with conversational partners, which promotes sustained interaction



Guiding Principles to the MAP

*Participation in age appropriate activities
provides functional experiences*

Involvement in these meaningful experiences
improves the quality of life and promotes self-
determination.



Guiding Principles to the MAP

Acquisition of language skills should be facilitated across the lifespan

All persons broaden their communication skills throughout their lives.

Individuals with disabilities will often need support to acquire or regain the communication skills needed as they encounter new experiences, as their capacity to benefit from critical incidental learning opportunities is frequently limited by cognitive, sensory or physical disabilities.



Guiding Principles to the MAP

When talking to or about the AAC, attention should be paid to the terminology used

Choose and utilize language that is respectful of their ages when speaking with, around or about them.



Guiding Principles to the MAP

Caregivers and instructors are faced with balancing issues of age appropriateness with the needs and interests of those persons functioning at levels comparable to toddlers and preschoolers.

(Consequently, many professionals find service provision for AACs to be difficult and some families hesitate to implement age appropriate practices.)



MAPing It Out

The selection of age appropriate materials often proves tricky

Even adults with no disabilities have interests, preferences and hobbies that may be considered juvenile. Though AACs often like juvenile toys, music and movies, it should not be assumed that they would never enjoy more adult-like choices. Of course, personal preference should be respected, but given sufficient exposure, ACCs may begin to select and/or prefer the age appropriate possibilities. *{Remember contrasting pairs...}*



MAPing It Out

An important function of adult-like materials and activities is to support emergent-level or re-emerging skills and behaviors

- For developing literacy and communication abilities, poetry and sing-alongs can supply the rhyme, rhythm, and repeated lines that children's story books do, but in a more age-appropriate format.
- Those who have responded well to children's picture books may adapt to flipping through magazines, catalogs, or newspapers with color pictures.
- Gainful employment as a greeter at a local business or as a storyteller for people in hospitals may be possible for those who use voice output systems.



MAPing It Out

Adult-like environments contribute to the normalization process of AACs

- Consideration should be given to décor including wall colors, window treatments, paintings and prints, posters with motivational messages or images of same-age peers
- Display functional objects such as digital clocks, thermometers, and interesting gadgets like lava lamps, fiber optic lamps, aromatherapy, water fountains, environmental sounds machines.
- Exhibit collections on walls and in curio cabinets, scrap books and shadow box frames



MAPing It Out

*Well chosen terminology aids in making
potentially juvenile activities or characteristics
more age appropriate*

*Key Concept: They are not boys & girls,
but are men & women*

- A woman does not play with dolls; she collects dolls.
- A man does not play with toy trains; he is a model train enthusiast.
- They do not wear diapers; they wear protective briefs.
- They do not wear bibs; they use clothing protectors.
- Instead of establishing “treatment groups,” consider “clubs” or “organizations,” such as “The Pink Ladies,” “Sports Club,” “Book Club,” “Music Club,” or “Soap Opera Club.”



MAPing It Out

The personal preferences of the individual should be weighted heavily in the decision making process.

Though AACs often like juvenile toys, music and movies, it should not be assumed that they would never enjoy more adult-like choices.

Of course, personal preference should be respected, but given sufficient exposure, ACCs may begin to select and/or prefer the age appropriate possibilities. (Beukelman and Mirenda's *Principle of Today and Tomorrow*)

The AACs can be allowed to participate in their juvenile type activities through volunteer or employment opportunities such as storybook readings or sing alongs.



MAPing It Out

Exploring age-appropriate options

- Select music box recordings or music boxes to satisfy a preference for children's high-pitched music.
- If animated shows and cartoons appeal to the AAC, some of the animated movies that appeal to people of all ages should be provided.
- If there is a preference for soft, stuffed toys, pillows of varying shapes filled with polystyrene beads may be enjoyed.
- Vibrating toys can be replaced with massagers or vibrating pillows and switches.



MAPing It Out

Resistance and Rejection

However, sometimes the changes made will be rejected, as the substituted item or activity will not satisfy the individual.

In these situations, it is especially important to allow individuals access to their preferred juvenile pursuits during times of high stress, such as transitions.

Behavior intervention programs should be considered to deal with modifying the dependency on specific objects or activities.



MAPing It Out

Decisions should be individualized

- When individuals have acquired disabilities, there is a history of personal preference to which the team can refer
- Considerations when the disability is developmental:
 - Individual may be interested in what preferred peers or members of his or her family enjoy.
 - The individual might reject items and materials enjoyed by people that they do not like.
 - A systematic preference assessment can provide insights into materials, objects and activities the person might enjoy.

*When possible, use a **team approach**
in making such decisions.*



Points of Interest on the MAP

- Diagnostics
- Literacy
- Learning and Leisure
- AAC
- Daily Living/Vocational
- Environment



LEGEND TO THE MAP

- Off the Shelf
- Extreme Make Over
 - Mini Make Over
 - Do It Yourself
 - Key Concept:
**They are men and women,
not boys and girls**



Using the MAP

Off the Shelf

Products manufactured specifically for AACs, as well as items that can be selected and used immediately, even though they are marketed for children or for people without disabilities.



Using the MAP

Mini Makeover

The modification of existing products provides a good opportunity to individualize materials for the AAC. This process need not always be difficult or time-intensive.

Extreme Makeover

Modification to existing materials that require considerable time, thought, skill and/or understanding.



Using the MAP

Do It Yourself

Products are not available and require that materials be designed and made from scratch to assist in the development of learning, leisure, and communication skills. Making items requires much time and effort but affords a great degree of individualization. Importantly, it allows families and professionals to develop much needed materials that are not yet in widespread commercial production.



Diagnostic Materials

Remembering the Key Concept

- Few standardized protocols result in the need for:
 - Adapting and modifying existing instruments
 - Careful interpretation of results from modified tools
 - Expertise on part of the professional performing assessment
- Assessment must include input and feedback from the person being evaluated regarding preferences, opinions & comprehension



Diagnostic Materials

Off The Shelf

- W.A.T.I. Assessment Package
(Wisconsin Assistive Technology Initiative)
 - www.wati.org (click on Materials)
- GPAT Evaluation Toolkits and Protocols
(Georgia Project for Assistive Technology)
 - www.gpat.org (under Resources, click on AT Evaluation)



Diagnostic Materials

Mini Make Over

- **Concepts about print assessment (demonstration):**

<http://teams.lacoe.edu/documentation/classrooms/patti/k-1/teacher/assessment/print/conceptsq.html>

- **Concepts of Print Assessment:**

<http://wilearns.state.wi.us/apps/default.asp?cid=92> (click on click here)



Literacy

Remembering the Key Concept

- Though many may never learn to read, involvement in reading opportunities provide positive learning and leisure experiences
- Understanding the basic functions of print permit AACs to participate in typical adult activities (greeting cards, writing letters, menus, signs)
- Having access to current information through newspapers and magazines is often important to AACs
- Being able to search and explore the internet provides meaningful experiences for AACs
- Shared reading and text with symbol and graphic supports can aid understanding and enjoyment of current and classic literature



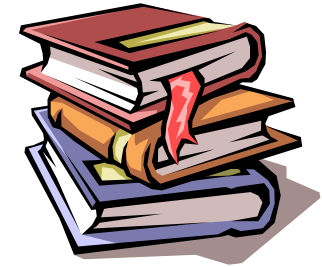
Literacy

Literacy Skills

- Help to maximize receptive and expressive language
- Provide exposure to knowledge and information
- Offer opportunity to experience behaviors, activities or events
- Support safety
- Promote concepts of beginning, middle and end
- Assist in AAC device use
- Encourage maintaining attention to task
- Aid in use of computers
- Present pleasurable experiences

Literacy

Literacy Skills



Characteristics of Books for Emergent Readers with Severe/Profound Disabilities

- Instructor enthusiasm
- Rhythm
- Repeated lines
- Nonsense sounds or noise
- Simple graphics
- Interactive graphics or novelettes
- Predictability
- Rhyme
- Ownership
- Age appropriate topics
- Age appropriate graphics
- Simple language



Literacy Makeover

- **Cover juvenile looking books with book covers**
- **Create new covers for childish looking books**
- **Use talking photo albums and personalized photographs to write and narrate stories**



Learning and Leisure

Remembering the Key Concept

- People continue to learn throughout their lives
- Change is difficult for many individuals and thus routines provide security and maximize receptivity to learning and enjoyment of activities
- Incidental learning is one of the most powerful types of learning

Just because someone is learning doesn't mean that it can't be fun and part of leisure

- The opinions of AACs are valuable and should be honored

Greater effort and enjoyment will result if AACs have ownership



Learning and Leisure

Off The Shelf

Companies Specializing in Persons with Special Needs

Software

- AbleLink Technologies, Inc.
 - Attainment
 - Don Johnston
- Exceptional Speech Products
 - Inclusive TLC
 - IntelliTools
- Judy Lynn Software, Inc.
 - Laureate
 - Mayer-Johnson
 - Simtech
 - Slater Software
 - SoftTouch



AAC

Remembering the Key Concept

- AACs are characterized by limited world knowledge due to restricted environment, few typical experiences, and sensory impairment; provision of an appropriate AAC system can help them access and control their environment and promote interaction in order to counteract those limitations
- For adolescents and adults, motivation and interest are especially critical for success
- One component of assuring AAC success might involve providing enticing or inspiring topics for communicative interactions



AAC

Remembering the Key Concept

- The choices and recommendations of professionals may be rejected due to preference for other modes of communication; adolescents in particular are often not interested in communicating “differently”
- Black and white symbols or line drawings are generally regarded as being more “adult-like”; however, the AACs often need color to distinguish between symbols or to aid in acquisition of symbol meaning



AAC

Remembering the Key Concept

Symbol sets are frequently child like in appearance. Consideration must be given to utilizing a symbol set that appears age appropriate, is pleasing to the user and provides adequate support for communication needs

- Replacement of socially unacceptable behavior and gestures with communicative acts should be a priority; substitutions should be “low effort/high efficiency”
- Respect and privacy should be granted in training communication of potentially embarrassing matters (e.g., toileting)



AAC

Remembering the Key Concept

- Keep vocational possibilities in mind as messages are selected and trained (e.g., greeting at church or local business)
- When using Partner Assisted Communication or Aided Communication, try to work toward genuine responses
- AACs will benefit from using their AAC systems with other AAC users and typical adults who are not paid support staff



AAC

Remembering the Key Concept

- Assuring AAC success for adolescent and adult users will likely involve providing:
 - Ways to communicate
 - Reasons to communicate
 - Something to communicate
 - Places in which to communicate
 - Others with whom to communicate



AAC

Do It Yourself

Provide topics and vocabulary to promote interactions with peers

- Pop Culture
- Sports
- Music
- TV
- Movies/DVD's
- Books
- Show/concerts
- Shopping
- Restaurants/food/menus
- Scrapbooks/memorabilia



AAC

Do It Yourself

Implement Social Groups or Clubs
to provide structured opportunities for communicating

- Consider room set up and seating
- Select and prepare materials that engage, motivate and stimulate
- Utilize routines to create anticipation and participation, for instance take attendance, read minutes, have special time for greetings and farewells
- Consider programming devices to make sound effects, cheers, catcalls, funny noises
- Try to have something tangible for each participant to take with them (Good conversation starter when returning home or to class)



Daily Living & Vocation

Remembering the Key Concept

- Jobs should be based on personal preferences, goals and skills
- Individual should have opportunity to explore job possibilities and help identify types of jobs
- Jobs should be purposeful and not just busy work
- Materials should be recognizable, functional and meaningful
- Supervisors, job coaches or mentors should get to know person well
- Pre-vocational training tasks should never be dismantled in the presence of the learner



Daily Living & Vocation

Remembering the Key Concept

- AAC should be encouraged to contribute to planning and organizing tasks, schedules, meals, and special events
- Help offer and identify strategies for dealing with the demands and stresses of daily work environments
- As with any job, provide ideas for organization and management of the work tasks
- Just as with typical individuals, AACs learn daily living tasks more readily in naturalistic environments
- Types of sexuality training should be identified and provided to prevent sexual abuse or others taking advantage of the individual



Daily Living & Vocation

Do It Yourself

- Create clear directions or instructions utilizing symbols and pictures

- Make work jigs that aid the person in performing the task

- Assemble work tasks for packaging, sorting, assembling, matching by utilizing items such as dice, pens, combs, markers, bolts, nuts, key rings, plastic bags, bins and containers

- Create templates and directions utilizing shapes, symbols and pictures



Environment

Remembering the Key Concept

At Home

- Encourage AACs to participate in making choices for décor
- Involve AACs in selecting and acquiring household items
- Having only one or two persons in a bedroom is considered more adult-like
- Assure that AACs are provided with ways of participating in as many routine activities as possible
- Resources: Center for Universal Design
 - www.disabilityresources.org
 - www.design.ncsu.edu/cud



Environment

Remembering the Key Concept

In Class

- Integrate student's work and ideas into the classroom environment
- Pop culture is often important to this age group, incorporate posters, materials, props, photos, magazines, books with those themes



Environment

Remembering the Key Concept

At Work

- AACs often have the same challenges in dealing with the work environment as typical individuals, they may just need additional supports in coping with them
- Opportunities should be provided to participate in all work procedures when possible
 - For example, provide accommodations for clocking/signing in
- Create overlays or program communication device with the vocabulary needed at the worksite



Environment

Off The Shelf

At Home

- Digital Alarm Clock
- TV in bedroom
- Personal subscriptions to premium channels or satellite
- Personal Computers or personal desktop
- Foot spas, tub whirlpools, massagers,
- Chairs with massagers, massager pillows
- Color motion lights (Homedics)
- Water fountains, mist fountains, aromatherapy devices, scent story CD players, sound spas



Environment

Off The Shelf

At School

Hang up posters (Musicians, Actors, Athletes) and photographs of adults and teenagers engaged in activities

- Use props that support school spirit
- Display materials that deal with science, astronomy or math
- Use uniform bulletin boards, frames or cork boards to display student's work
- Exhibit books, magazines and newspapers that have teenagers and adults on the cover or that are the subject of the book
- Create a cozy environment with comfortable chairs, sofa or rockers with lamps to encourage individuals to sit and read.



Environment

Mini Makeover

At Home

- For individual's rooms, consider using themes (e.g, music, animals, movies, collections or use regional or ethnic themes)
- Use textures and fabrics that support positive sensory experiences (e.g., fake fur, gauzy fabrics)
- Use posters and photos



Remember the Goal

AAC for AACs:

Age Appropriate Communication

For

*Adolescent and Adult
Communicators*



Thank you for your interest in Age Appropriate Communication

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